

Social Categories of Gods and People:
Social Relations and Their Diachronic Transformations
in God Worship in a Taiwanese Village

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1. Research background

1.1. Introduction

Research on Taiwanese folk religion has had two major contexts. Some scholars explored the cosmology of the supernatural in folk religion (e.g., Jordan 1972; Wolf 1974; Kiuchi 1989; Mio 1990a; Ting 2012), while others attempted to understand social structures by looking at the rituals for gods in folk religion. Early studies in the latter context claimed that people formed communities to conduct rituals (e.g., Wang S. 1972; Hsu 1978; Lin 1986). Currently, their discussions were criticized for oversimplifying the complex social relations in local societies (Chang 2000). In fact, there were several different forms of god worship in Taiwanese society (Kiuchi 1988; Mio 1991; Suenari 1991). Some local societies did not prepare specific buildings to worship gods (Suenari 1991). However, little attention has been paid to how people themselves categorized such various “social” forms of god worship or whether such categories underwent any transformations. This study clarifies how the construction of temples influenced the “social relationships between people and gods” in local Taiwanese societies⁽¹⁾.

1.2. Previous Studies

The first context, which explored the cosmology of Taiwanese folk religion, was based on the scheme of Jordan (1972) and Wolf (1974). They sorted people’s supernatural worship into three categories: gods, ghosts, and ancestors. In this vision, a human being consists of a spirit and a body. The spirit leaves the body upon death. Some spirits are regarded as ancestors and are worshipped by their descendants, while other spirits who have lost the descendants who worshipped them are seen as ghosts. Ghosts are malicious and harmful to people. Gods, the third category, maintain the supernatural order. They have their own hierarchy and bureaucracy. The bureaucracy selects good spirits and appoints them as new “gods” (Jordan 1972; Wolf 1974). The three categories are not fixed but fluid, and there are some intermediate existences between the categories (Kiuchi 1989; Mio 1990a). Sometimes ghosts and ancestors are redefined as gods (Mio 1990b; Ting 2012). It should be noted that the supernatural orders consisting of these three entities do not include the people who worship them.

Social relations among the people who worship the supernatural are another matter.

Social relations among people were mainly discussed in the second context. Scholars thought that religious ties played important roles in multi-surname settlements in Han-Chinese societies, including Taiwan, because the descent groups did not integrate into the settlements. These religious relations were strengthened by corporate rituals in “village temples” (Tai T. 1943; Topley 1968). In the 1970s, Taiwanese researchers began to use the concept of the “ritual sphere” (祭祀圈 *jisiquan*). They claimed that religious relations bound settlements together and formed communities in local societies (Wang S. 1972; Chuang 1977; Hsu 1978; Lin 1986, 1988). In their discussions, each inhabitant in a “ritual sphere” has the responsibility to manage rituals for the gods. They elect a “pot master” (爐主 *loo-tsu*) and assistants from the local households. These managers collect per capita dues (丁口錢 *ting-khau-tsim*) from each household and conduct corporate rituals for the gods. The gods patrol the territory and protect the inhabitants of the “ritual sphere” (Hsu 1978). Recently, several scholars have criticized early studies on “ritual spheres.” Chang (2000) argues that they misidentified religious relationships as integrated communities. In fact, the inhabitants were not always integrated in the so-called “ritual spheres” (Kiuchi 1988).

Discussions on “ritual spheres” were related to the local developmental history of Taiwan. They assumed that people constructed temples in each settlement in a certain developmental stage. The predominant temple connected the other temples together (Hsu 1978; Chuang 1977). Recent studies also accept these developmental views (e.g., Wang C. 2008). In fact, some settlements did not have temples but still conducted their own corporate rituals for the gods. Such settlements were regarded as “settlements which do not have wealth to build their temples” (Lin 1993, p. 174). In contrast, Suenari (1985) criticized this assumption in developmental history as a “village-temple-based model” (p. 259). He clarified that the foundations of several local temples were not always related to the developmental histories of the settlements. Some inhabitants constructed temples in their settlements in the post-war period. Rituals for the gods were conducted by god-worshipping associations (神明會) (Suenari 1991). Masuda (1939) pointed out that “the first temple [in a settlement] was constructed by bamboo pillars and thatched roofs. It did not need any special expenses and was able to [be constructed] in a few days as long as they had extra materials and labor” (p. 10). In other words, inhabitants could construct a small temple when they needed it and intended to do so. The wealth of the settlement did not relate to whether they conducted rituals in their temples or left them to their associations. The two types of corporate rituals for the gods — ones based in local temples and ones organized by local associations — should not be seen in a straightforward developmental model. We should see them as two independent forms of corporate rituals for the gods.

1.3. Research Framework

This study takes a historical approach. Previous research on Taiwanese folk religion contained the two major contexts mentioned above. The first explored the three categories of the supernatural, while the second focused on the historical development of social units in relation to religion. However, both contexts paid little attention to the diachronic transformations of the “social” categories of gods and people. Some studies could suggest ways of addressing this problem. In the mid-1980s, underground gambling, called *dajiale* (大家樂), spread all over Taiwan (Hu 1988; Mio 1995). People privately bet on the winning numbers of the public lottery. Interestingly, many people believed they could learn the winning numbers through divination. The winners made donations or gave other kinds of tributes to supernatural entities. Several temples experienced rapid development thanks to the donations. Some supernatural beings were put into the category of gods and were said to become “genuine gods” (正神 *tsing-sin*) (Mio 1995). Twenty years have passed since the *dajiale* boom, and these new “genuine gods” continue to be worshipped in local societies (Tai W. 2011; Ting 2012). However, Taiwanese villages already had many “genuine gods” before the 1980s. Did people regard these supernatural entities as being in the same category as the existing gods? In other words, how did people “socialize” the new deities?

The scheme of “gods, ghosts, and ancestors” is very important for recognizing the folk categories of the supernatural in Taiwan, and it will be important in the future. We should note that the scheme is used to distinguish supernatural beings from one another. People made other categories when they formed organizations to worship these beings. It was previously mentioned that “no-temple villages” were not well covered in the discussions on Taiwanese folk religion ⁽²⁾. In fact, the word “village temple” (庄廟 *tsng-bio*) is not very familiar to the people of Taiwan. They tend to use the terms “large temple” (大廟 *tua-bio*) or “common temple” (公廟 *kong-bio*). Why are the temples of a village or a settlement described as “large” (大 *tua*) or “common” (公 *kong*)? Suenari (1991) gives us a clue by explaining the difference between the temples of “*kong*” (公) and “*su*” (私). Suenari suggests that the former means that all the inhabitants manage the temple spontaneously and collectively, and the latter means that the temple is managed only by some inhabitants. Lin (2000) reports that people in Kaohsiung (高雄) used the categories of “*su-put-a*” (私佛仔), “*tsu-put-a*” (族佛仔), and “*kong-put-a*” (公佛仔). According to Lin, the first two referred to the divine statues that were worshipped by a family or kinship group ⁽³⁾. The latter referred to the divine statues that achieved a higher position and became the gods of the “common temples” (*kong-bio*). These reports show the existence of the “social” categories *kong* and *su*, which were used to show the social positions of gods in micro-societies. Of course, the dichotomy is relative and not fixed. There can be large and small temples in a village or a settlement, however, the one category that is the most represented is that of the “large

temples” (*tua-bio*).

This study clarifies how the temples called *tua-bio* or *kong-bio* influenced the social relationships related to god worship and the related categories. I focus on gods because only gods can be related to and worshipped in communal places. Ghosts have neither permanent residences nor prayers. They are always wandering although villagers do corporately “treat” them in the hungry ghost festival (普渡 *phoo-too*). Ancestors can only be worshipped by their descendants, and non-relatives do not and should not worship them.

2. Field Setting

My research site — D Village — is located in the center of the Chianan (嘉南) plain, which spreads over the Yunlin (雲林), Chiayi (嘉義), and Tainan (臺南) regions in western Taiwan. The village is an administrative unit of Houbi (後壁) District in Tainan Municipality. There are six settlements — O, K, W, C, T, and G — surrounded by double-cropping rice paddies. D Village is not a special community in the Chianan plain area, and it is neither new nor old. One can find the names of K, C, W, and T settlements in a historical text (臺灣府輿圖纂要) edited around 1860 (Anonymous 1963, p. 181). Five settlements excluding G appear in a temple monument carved in 1872 (Huang et al. 2007, p. 195). Most villagers are of Minnan origin; these people came from southern Fujian (福建) Province in mainland China and became the majority in Taiwanese society. Early settlers farmed sweet potatoes, upland rice, and peanuts because of the unreliable water supply in the area. Though the construction of the Chianan canal improved the water situation in 1930, it was not until people enjoyed stable irrigation that they could produce double-cropping rice. Such a background is common to the villages on the Chianan plain. It seems to be quite important that we can find evidence of “no-temple” rituals and the late construction of temples in both D Village and Houbi District. This fact lets us reconsider the relationship between local societies and rituals for the supernatural in the whole Chianan plain area.

There are some common surnames in D Village. **Table 1** lists the most common surnames recorded in the 2012 phone book. The Sun, Jiang, Xu, and Niu people developed relatively integrated descent groups under these surnames. Each group conducted corporate rituals for their ancestors in their ancestral halls. Since the Sun people are descended from several different ancestors, the two majority lines called “old Sun” and “new Sun” formed two different groups and conducted rituals independently. The Liu people are predominantly found in K settlement (a few Yan, Ye, and Xu households also live in this settlement). Their kinship ties are quite weak compared to the other major surnames. Today, the Sun and Niu people have ceased conducting corporate rituals for their ancestors. Only the Jiang and Xu remain in their ancestral halls.

Families of Minnan origin usually have a domestic altar in the main room (廳 *thiann*) of their house. A domestic altar is “the spatial focus of [a family’s] religious activity” (Jordan 1972, p. 93). People put their ancestral tablets (公媽 *kong-ma*) on the altar, and some people “invite” divine statues (佛祖 *put-tsoo*) to the center of the altar (see Jordan 1972; Feuchtwang 1974). Currently, most villagers conduct rituals for their ancestors on their domestic altars.

Table 1. Major Surnames and Households in D Village

	Settlement					
	C	K	O	W	T	G
Number of Households	Sun (60) Jiang (19) Xu (19) Xin (14) Zhuang (12) Fang (12) Yi (11) Weng (6)	Liu (33)	Niu (11) Ding (7) Zhuang (6)	Xu (9) Liu (7)	Gan (8) Zhu (6)	Qiao (8)
Total	190	50	35	27	39	8

Note: Surnames of over six households are shown in the table.

Source: Author (Phone book in Houbi District in 2012)



Figure 1. Domestic Altar

Source: Author

Just like the other Chianan villages, D Village is suffering from severe outward migration. A total of 510 households and 1,499 people were registered in D Village in 2015 according to official statistics. However, the actual population is less than the registered population because of out-

migration. The Taiwanese economy experienced rapid growth from the 1960s to the 1990s. During this period, many villagers — including women — became industrial workers employed by rural factories. After the 2000s, Taiwanese industries began to transfer their production bases to mainland China in search of cheaper labor. One after another, rural factories closed or collapsed, and the laborers out-migrated to urban industrial areas. Today, younger villagers also leave their homeland to seek urban employment or higher education.

My field research in D Village was conducted for a total of approximately 11 months between December 2012 and March 2017. This study uses data from participant observations, informal interviews, and historical documents collected in the field. The congregation of a certain temple or god-worshipping association (信徒 *sin-too* or 弟子 *te-tsu*) asks gods for their opinions via divination, and then has discussions to prepare the rituals. Such a collective decision-making process for the rituals is called “common issues” (公事 *kong-su*). I conducted participant observation in the periodical rituals and their preparation including *kong-su* in D Village. Informal interviews were also conducted in these situations.

The formal names of gods, places, and persons are Romanized in Hanyu pinyin (漢語拼音), but some place names use the popular Romanization instead (i.e., Taipei, Kaohsiung, etc.). The local names of gods and folk terms are Romanized in Minnan (Hokkienese) by TL (臺羅 *tailuo*). Pseudonyms are used to protect the informants’ privacy. Some readers might wonder why I chose to use two Chinese dialects — Mandarin and Minnan — in the same study. I decided to do so because it reflects the complex language situations in contemporary Taiwanese villages. The elders who are over 70 years old seldom speak Mandarin in their daily lives, whereas middle-aged and younger people switch between the two dialects in their conversations. Moreover, some folk or technical terms did not correspond between Mandarin and Minnan. People often use Minnan terms in Mandarin conversations, or use Mandarin terms in Minnan conversations.

3. Gods and Corporate Rituals in Houbi District

Houbi District consists of 22 administrative villages, but not all the “villages” are actual settlements. Some large settlements include two or three administrative villages: Anxiliao (安溪寮) has three villages (Ping'an [平安], Fu'an [福安], and Chang'an [長安]), Xiaqiadong (下茄苳) has two villages (Jiatian [嘉田] and Jiamin [嘉民]), and Qingliao (箐寮) has two villages (Molin [墨林] and Qingfeng [箐豐]). The three small “towns” have the large temples that attract visitors from outside the district.

At present, we can see 29 settlements in Houbi District. Of course, not every settlement has a temple. For example, the Houbi settlement has no temple to organize its inhabitants. The settlement was formed and expanded after the colonial government established a district office. It has 27 settle-

ments that each have their own temples. There was another settlement called Tandihu (潭底湖), but it and its temple disappeared due to out-migration. Additionally, the Shangqiadong (上茄苳) settlement has two famous temples called *Taiangong* (泰安宮) and *Jingzhongmiao* (旌忠廟). These temples are managed by a single organization which integrates the inhabitants. Based on these facts, it appears that a settlement's temple generally integrates its inhabitants.

However, the situation is quite different from the historical perspectives. I referred to a book called *Temple Directory of Tainan Prefecture* (臺南州祠廟名鑑). The book was published in 1933. According to the editor, they edited the *Directory* based on registrations made in the 1910s and a new survey conducted in 1930. In fact, the *Directory* only lists 15 temples in Houbi District. How should we interpret this? Did the editor overlook some small temples? I rearranged the establishment years of each temple called a *tua-bio* in Houbi District in **Table 2** based on my field research and previous literature.

The *Directory* fails to record some temples, but that is not of great importance here. It is far more important that there were settlements that did not have any temples that can be regarded as *tua-bio*. Ten temples were founded after WW II: four were built shortly after the war and six were built after the 1960s. This shows that it was not rare for a settlement to have no temples to organize its inhabitants (i.e., “no-temple” villages).

Table 2. Establishment Years of *Toa-bio* in Houbi District

	Before 1894	1894 to 1945	After 1945
Number of Temples	11	8	10

Source: Author (Sagara (1933), Huang et al. (2007) and field resources)

Today, the two famous temples in the Shangqiadong settlement — *Taiangong* and *Jingzhongmiao* — attract many visitors from inside and outside of Houbi District. *Taiangong* was founded in 1779 to worship *Mazu* (媽祖); *Jingzhongmiao* was founded in 1791 to worship *Yuewumuwang* (岳武穆王) (Sagara 1933, pp. 135–136). According to a monument carved in 1872, the 36 nearby settlements elected a managing settlement for corporate rituals for the gods using a rotation system. We can find the names of five settlements (O, K, W, C, and T) out of the 36 (Huang et al. 2007, p. 195). However, the parades we can see today began later. Such parades are called either *raojing* (遶境) or *chuxun* (出巡) in Mandarin, or *un-tsg* (溫庄) in Minnan (Hokkienese). People carry divine statues on palanquins; the gods “patrol” their territories via the parades. The first united parade of *Taiangong* and *Jingzhongmiao* was organized by a local leader named *Liaotan* (廖炭) (Huang et al. 2007, p. 146). Today,

people remember him by his nickname, *Liau-a-tuann*. He mastered kung fu and taught it in nearby settlements. Many “kung fu groups” (陣頭 *tin-thau*) were founded under his influence. This was the case with a group called *Liong-bu-tin* (龍武陣) in D Village. The second parade was conducted in 1927, but the third took place much later. In 1967, the parade was revived to celebrate the renovation of *Jingzhongmiao* (Huang et al. 2007). Since 1967, *Taiangong* and *Jingzhongmiao* have conducted the parade every third or fourth year.

A total of 65 temples participated in the recent parade in 2017. Two large palanquins and 65 leading palanquins were carried through several districts, including Houbi and Baihe (白河) in Tainan Municipality, and Shuishang (水上) and Lucao (鹿草) in Chiayi County. The temples and settlements greet the gods and participants when the procession passes. Ueno (1988) reports that there are stable relations called *kau-pue* (交陪) among participating settlements in this kind of parade. I could not find such stable relations in my field research. By contrast, there were constant fights between participating groups over who would lead the procession (頭陣 *thau-tin*). Today, a managing committee decides the order of the parade to avoid such conflicts.

4. Corporate Rituals for Gods in D Village

4.1. *Tua-bio*, *Non-tua-bio*, and God-Worshipping Associations

Table 3. *Tua-bio* in D Village

Settlement	Name	Founding Year	Worshipped God	Reconstructed in
O	Huichangong	1923	Dadechanshi (Ngo-sai-kong) Zhongtanyuanshuai (Thai-tsi-ia) Baoshengdadi	1985
K	Daitianfu	Shortly after WW II	Jinfuqiansui Guanyinfozu (Kuan-im-ma) Zhongtanyuanshuai (Thai-tsi-ia)	1993
C	Tiansangong	1967	Sanweizunwang (Tua-ong-kong, Li-ong-kong, Sam-ong-kong) Wugushengwang (Ngo-kok-ong-kong) Guanyinfozu (Kuan-im-ma) Wudezunwang Qingshuizushi Zhongtanyuanshuai (Thai-tsi-ia)	—
T	Shengxuangong	The Late 19th Century	Guandishengjun Xuantianshangdi (Siong-te-kong) Ganfuqiansui	1984 and 1994

Note: Parentheses show the folk names in the field.

Source: Author (Sagara (1933), Huang et al. (2007) and field resources)

Table 3 shows the temples called *tua-bio*, which are identified as representing each settlement in D Village. Taiwanese people tend to worship several different gods at each temple. Some gods are believed to have certain specialties, such as voyages (*Mazu*), medicine (保生大帝 *Baoshengdadi*), agriculture (五谷聖王 *Wugushengwang*), and so forth. However, people do not always pray to the gods for their specialties. Mio (1991) points out that “a deity meaningful for people in daily life is one who can grant everything” (p. 118). The characteristics of the gods do not necessarily reflect the special characteristics of the settlements⁽⁴⁾.

W and G settlements have no temples identified as *tua-bio*. Actually, G “settlement” should be called a small “homestead” rather than an independent settlement. The inhabitants participate in corporate rituals in GA Village in Baihe District. W settlement is a “no-temple village.” The inhabitants conduct corporate rituals for *Guanyinfozu* (觀音佛祖) by rotation. I list four *tua-bio* in **Table 3**, but in fact there are many other temples for worshipping gods in D Village. **Table 4** shows the non-*tua-bio* in each settlement. The table does not include private altars for worshipping gods. As mentioned above, some Taiwanese families worship divine statues placed on their domestic altars. These statues are usually worshipped only by family members. However, some altars accept outsiders through divination or shamanism. D Village also has such developed private altars called *Cihuitan* (慈惠壇), *Guanlongtan* (觀龍壇), *Baoxiangong* (寶賢宮), and so forth. *Xuanjigong* (玄濟宮) was developed from a private altar into a “temple” through shamanism. Though *Shengwangfu* (聖王府) was founded relatively old, it still has a strong private character. Two shaman brothers conduct divination regularly today. In **Table 4**, *Wanpinggongmiao* (萬平公廟), *Jintaitan* (金泰壇), *Lixingci* (李姓祠), *Shuntiantang* (順天堂), and *Feitiantang* (飛天堂) are different from the temples that originated from private altars. I will describe the characteristics of these temples in section five.

Table 4. Non-*tua-bio* in D Village

Settlement	Name	Founding Year	Worshipped God
O	Wanpinggongmiao	1930s	Wanping gong
K	Jintaitan	2010	Liufuqiansui, Guanyinfozu
	Lixingci	n.d.	Lixinggong
C	Shengwangfu	Colonial era	Yuewumuwang and other gods
	Shuntiantang	1996	Wugong, Liaogong, Liangma
	Feitiantang	1998	Lijiangjun
	Xuanjigong	2017	Xuantianshangdi and other gods

Note: “n.d.” means “not dated.”

Source: Author

Some inhabitants organize god-worshipping associations in D Village. The members worship a divine statue by rotation. The associations conduct regular corporate rituals for the god and elect a pot master via the tossing of a pair of half-moon blocks (柶 *pue*). The pot master “invites” the statue to his domestic altar and manages the next corporate ritual. **Table 5** lists these associations in the village.

Today, the associations are not large, and about 10 or more households rotate statues. The members are inhabitants or out-migrated inhabitants of each settlement. The rituals conducted by god-worshipping associations are quite similar to the one seen in W settlement. Nevertheless, people do not call the “organization” a god-worshipping association.

Table 5. God-Worshipping Associations in D Village

Settlement	Name	Organized Year	Worshipped God
O	Yüexunhui	2012	Yüewumuwang (guan-sui-ia)
K	Guanyinmahui	n/a	Guanyinfozu (Kuan-im-ma)
C	Wuguwanghui and Taiziyehui	1887	Wugushengwang (Ngo-kok-ong-kong) Zhongtanyuanshuai (Thai-tsi-ia)
	Guanyinmahui	1881	Guanyinfozu (Kuan-im-ma)
	Taiziyehui	2015	Zhongtanyuanshuai (Thai-tsi-ia)
T	Shangdiyehui	n/a	Xuantianshangdi (Siong-te-kong)

Note: “n/a” means “not available.”

Source: Author (Sagara (1933) and field resources)



Figure 2. Pue Tossing (跋柶 *puah-pue*)

Source: Author

4.2. Appearances of *Tua-bio* in D Village

Corporate rituals for gods in temples were not common in Houbi District in the colonial period. The links among gods, temples, and settlements were the result of historical transformation. *Tua-bio*, which represents the settlements, appeared through the transformation.

When we talk about their transformation, we cannot overlook the influence of a certain historical event. The Sino–Japanese War in 1937 drove the Japanese Shintoists to interfere with Taiwanese folk religion. They appealed to local officials to “Shintoize” domestic altars and rearrange (eliminate) small temples (Tsai 1991). In Houbi District, the higher administration collected and removed divine statues, relocating them to the Xinying (新營) District office. During this process, some statues disappeared or were burned. There were 19 *tua-bio* in the late colonial period. Nine of them took back their statues and revived worship after WW II. Gods in D Village also experienced this persecution and subsequent revival. Since corporate rituals were forbidden in public, people hid their statues in lofts or in the ground to worship in secret. I describe the transformation of corporate rituals for the gods below. The transformation was not a straightforward development, but a meandering process.

4.2.1. C Settlement

Today, inhabitants of C settlement regard *Tiansangong* (天三宮) as a *tua-bio*. The temple was constructed in 1967. C settlement was a “no-temple village” before its construction, and gods were mainly worshipped by descent groups or god-worshipping associations at that time. **Table 6** shows the gods worshipped by each descent group before 1967.

Table 6. Gods Worshipped by Descent Groups in C Settlement before 1967

Descent Group	Gods
Old Sun	Lifuqiansui (Tua-ong-kong) Chifuqiansui (Li-ong-kong) Wufuqiansui (Sam-ong-kong)
Xu	Wugushengwang (Ngo-kok-ong-kong) Jinfuqiansui
Jiang	Wedezunwang
Yi	Zhongtanyuanshuai (Thai-tsi-ia)

Note: Parentheses show the folk names in the field.

Source: Author

Memories of god-worshipping associations from the old days are being lost today. Some were reorganized after the 1970s. The *Directory* records two associations that existed in C settlement in the 1930s.

a. *Guanyinmahui* (觀音媽會)

One association was called *Guanyinmahui*. A man named Chen Pi moved from SJ settlement in Baihe District to C settlement. He brought with him a statue of *Guanyinfozu* and organized an association with another man named Xu JX in C settlement. The first association was broken up in 1905, but some members organized a new association in the same year. The 11 members bought fields and supported the association with the resulting rental income.

b. *Taiziyehui* (太子爺會)

The other association was called *Taiziyehui*, and was organized by a man named Sun Z for worshipping *Zhongtanyuanshuai* (中壇元帥). The eight members collected donations and created a fund to manage the association.

No one remembers exactly why the leaders in C settlement decided to construct a new temple. Some elders still remember that the inhabitants conducted a corporate ritual on the 2nd of January every year before 1967. They set up a temporary altar by a pond in the center of C settlement to conduct the ritual. The inhabitants “invited” every divine statue worshipped in the settlement and conducted a corporate ritual for them all⁽⁵⁾.

The construction of *Tiansangong* replaced this annual custom. It is said that Jiang RL, who was the village chief at that time, strongly promoted the construction. The statues that were worshipped by descent groups and god-worshipping associations were concentrated into *Tiansangong*. Such concentrations of gods were called “falling into common” (落公 *loh-kong*). Inhabitants decided the hierarchy of each god in the process of the concentration. Three *Ong-kong* (王公), which were worshipped by the “old Sun” family, took the lead position and were named *Sanweizunwang* (三位尊王). The other gods were collectively called “the mass of gods” (眾神 *tsing-sin*). Of course, not every inhabitant agreed with the “loh-kong” of the gods. The Xu family had worshipped two divine statues, *Wugushengwang* and *Jinфуqiansui* (金府千歲), on their domestic altar. They agreed to donate a statue of *Wugushengwang* for every inhabitant, but refused to do so for the other. The statue of *Jinфуqiansui* still often participates in the rituals in *Tiansangong*, however, it is seen as a “personal divine statue” (*su-put-a*) by the inhabitants. Non-Xu people do not (or believe they should not) worship the statue. They regard it as the same as the other gods worshipped on each domestic altar.

4.4.2. T Settlement

Shengxuanguong (聖玄宮) is called *tua-bio* in T settlement. The settlement's inhabitants worship three principal gods in the temple: *Guanshengdijun* (關聖帝君), *Xuantianshangdi* (玄天上帝), and *Ganfuqiansui* (甘府千歲). The statue of *Guanshengdijun* was brought from mainland China to Taiwan by an ancestor of the Zhu family. The family worshipped it on their domestic altar and attracted many outsiders who prayed for their wishes to be granted. There was another family named Xie in T settlement at that time. They worshipped *Xuantianshangdi* in their house. In the late-nineteenth century, some outsiders built a small sugar factory near T settlement, and the inhabitants believed that it harmed the feng shui of the settlement. According to the legend, *Guanshengdijun* and *Xuantianshangdi* foretold the punishment of the factory through divination. Just as foretold, the factory's equipment was destroyed and the outsiders left the settlement. The "miracle" attracted more visitors to worship these gods. In the early colonial period, two brothers from the Gan family proposed that people prepare a place for the gods, most likely due to the increase in the number of worshippers. The place was named *Hezhutan* (合竹壇) and it was a simple shrine made of bamboo. The Gan brothers added a new statue of *Ganfuqiansui* to the shrine when it was completed. In the late 1930s, the inhabitants hid the divine shrines to prevent their destruction by the Japanese. The end of WW II enabled people to revive the shrines and rituals for the gods. In 1984, the inhabitants decided to build a new brick temple for their gods. *Hezhutan* was rebuilt and renamed *Shengxianmiao* (聖賢廟). In 1994, the temple was again reconstructed using reinforced concrete and had its name changed to *Shengxuanguong*. Today, the gods are worshipped mainly by the inhabitants and their relatives. Few outsiders visit the temple in T settlement.

4.2.3. W Settlement

W settlement does not have any temples, including *tua-bio*. Twenty households in the settlement rotate the statue of *Guanyinfozu*. People are not sure when the statue was brought to the settlement or by whom. Though the settlement has no temple, it has a well-integrated organization. The organization seems to have been established before the 1920s, because the statue and inhabitants participated in the parades of *Taiangong* and *Jingzhongmiao* in 1926. Their worshipping system is similar to that of the god-worshipping associations: a pot master is elected via *pue* tossing. He has to worship the common statue on his domestic altar. At the same time, its management system is also similar to that of the temple organizations: every household in the settlement must join the association. The pot master collects per capita dues (丁錢 *ting-tsin*) for corporate rituals. If some money is left over from the rituals, it is added to the common fund. People ask their god questions via divination to discuss preparations, such as whether she is satisfied with the rituals or not, whether she hopes to visit other temples, and so on. The issues concerning their gods, rituals, and settlements are called

“common issues” (*kong-su*). Though people ask their god for her opinion, secular issues — expenses or compensation for the common fund — are discussed by all the households in the settlement. Such a collective decision-making process is almost the same as that of *tua-bio*.

4.2.4. K Settlement

Daitianfu (代天府) is regarded as a *tua-bio* in K settlement. There are three principal gods in the temple: *Jinfuqiansui*, *Guanyinfozu*, and *Zhongtanyuanshuai*. It is said that the early inhabitants “invited” *Jinfuyuanshuai* from Baihe District. I could not find any other clues about how people conducted corporate rituals for their gods. The gods of K settlement did not participate in the parades of *Taiangong* and *Jingzhongmiao* in 1926. The inhabitants remember that the divine statues were put in a small wooden house shortly after WW II. The building was not in the style of a temple and was simply called “*Jinfuqiansuitan*” (金府千歲壇). In 1991, the inhabitants collected donations and built a new temple of reinforced concrete. Its name, *Daitianfu*, was formally decided at that time. *Daitianfu* invited some *su-put-a* as “guests” in recent corporate rituals.

4.2.5. O Settlement

O settlement was settled by the Niu family. In the nineteenth century, some Niu people lacked male heirs. One Niu man adopted a child from the Lin family from SQ settlement in Houbi District. The Lin people today believe that the blood of the Niu people run through their veins, because an ancestor of the Lin family was also adopted from the Niu family in O settlement. Another Niu man took bridegrooms from the Zhuang family in XQ settlement in the same district. O settlement gained several different surnames through these relationships. The Niu family brought the statues of *Ngo-sai-kong* (五使公) and *Ang-kong* (尪公, which means “the statue”) from mainland China. Furthermore, they invited *Baoshengdadi* from SQ settlement. In 1923, the Niu people constructed an “ancestral hall” (祖厝 *tsu-tsoo*) to hold their ancestral tablets. The three divine statues were worshipped along with the ancestors of the Niu people. When “Shintoization” spread to Houbi District, the inhabitants hid their divine statues in the dwelling of the Zhuang family. The statues of *Ngo-sai-kong* and *Baoshengdadi* were returned to the ancestral hall, but the statue of *Ang-kong* was not found after WW II. The Lin family had worshipped their statue of *Zhongtanyuanshuai* since the colonial period. The inhabitants decided to “invite” and worship it instead of *Ang-kong*. They thought that worshipping three gods was more auspicious than two. Though the ancestral hall became a common place for inhabitants, some Niu people thought it was not appropriate for non-Niu people to enter the place of their ancestors. In the 1980s, a Niu man succeeded in business and donated money to rebuild the place

for the gods. The inhabitants agreed with his proposal. Before the reconstruction, they researched the background of the statue that they called *Ngo-sai-kong* and “identified” it as the same as a god called *Dadechanshi* (大德禪師). In 1985, a new building was built using reinforced concrete and was formally registered as a “temple” named *Huichangong* (慧禪宮) with the local government.

4.3 The Influence of the Appearances of *Tua-bio* on Associations

The inhabitants prepared a fixed place to worship the gods and began to identify it as a *tua-bio*, which represented the settlement. The so-called *loh-kong* was a trigger for these changes in recognition. The *tua-bio* became the only organization conducting rituals for all the inhabitants. For example, the god-worshipping association (*Taiziyehui*) for *Zhongtanyuanshuai* disappeared after the *loh-kong* in C settlement. In the 1970s, some inhabitants reorganized it to worship both the statues of *Zhongtanyuanshuai* and *Wugushengwang*. They changed the association’s name to *Wuguwanghui* (五谷王會). Today, every god-worshipping association in C settlement rotates its statue and “invites” another statue of the same deity from *Tiansangong* to rituals and divinations. They think they are worshipping the gods that stayed in the temple by rotating their statue. The associations in K and T settlements are also regarded as worshipping the gods in the *tua-bio* through their divine statues⁽⁶⁾. By contrast, the statue of *Guanyinfozu* in W settlement has no outside temples that she belongs to.

The kung fu group in C settlement (*Liong-bu-tin*) was organized in 1926. The members trained in kung fu with their master in his house (武館 *bu-kuan*) in the settlement. They performed kung fu and lion dances at the rituals for the gods of the settlement. When the gods visited the outside, *Liong-bu-tin* became their guards. After *Tiansangong* was constructed, the groups came to be recognized as belonging to the temple. An altar was made in *Tiansangong* for the lion mask (獅頭 *sai-thau*) used in the lion dance of *Liong-bu-tin*. The inhabitants identify it as the same as the holy tiger (虎爺 *hoo-ia*) guarding the temple. Though the leader of *Liong-bu-tin* is still called a “master” (館主 *kuan-tsu*), they are elected by *pue* tossing so as to ask for the gods’ opinion in *Tiansangong*.

The appearances of *tua-bio* in each settlement influenced the relationships between the associations and the temples. However, the administrative unit (D Village) hardly affected the recognition of the people in its territory. The five settlements are independent of one another in their rituals. There is no hierarchy among the gods of each *tua-bio* (and of W settlement). Of course, it is not right to say that the inhabitants have no relation to each ritual for the gods. Each *tua-bio* and the organization of W settlement invite the village chief of D Village as a secular representative of their territories. With the exception of *Liong-bu-tin*, there are no other kung fu groups or performance groups in D Village. People ask the group to accompany their gods when they visit the outside world. *Liong-bu-tin* members think they should cooperate with the rituals in *Tiansangong* as volunteers because “the group

belongs to *Tiansangong*.” The other temples in D Village are “able to ask” *Liong-bu-tin* to cooperate, but they should provide the group with some sort of reward because “the group does not belong to their settlements.”



Figure 3. *Liong-bu-tin* Performance

Source: Author

5. Constructions for the “New Gods”

5.1. *Shuntiantang* and *Feitiantang*

In the mid-1980s, divinations for a lottery called *dajiale* spread through D Village. The inhabitants remembered that many people were absorbed by lotteries and divinations. Some did *pue* tossing in the public cemetery. Some burned incense in small temples all night to ask for the winning numbers. We saw earlier that there were temples other than *tua-bio* and personal altars in D Village. *Wanpinggongmiao* (萬平公廟) and *Lixingci* (李姓祠) originated from old bones excavated close to the settlements. Such deities that originated from the dead without descendants are generally called *u-eng-kong* (有應公) in Taiwan. People distinguish them from ghosts who do not settle in certain places (Mio 1990a). Taiwanese temples usually have gates to prevent ghosts from intruding. The temples for *u-eng-kong* are different. They have no gates and let the other ghosts come and go. The origin of the deities in *Shuntiantang* (順天堂) is similar to that of *u-eng-kong*. They were from old neglected tombs near C settlement before the *dajiale* boom. The origin of *Feitiantang* (飛天堂) is a bit different from the other three. Today, we can see many banyan trees in Taiwanese villages. Old banyans are respected and called *Thing-a-kong* (榕仔公). In the 1980s, the Xu people in C settlement conducted divinations at their domestic altars. One day, an unknown spirit appeared in the process of divination. He told them that he was the spirit of a Japanese general named *Lijiangjun* (李將軍) and settled in a nearby banyan tree.

The deities of *Shuntiantang* and *Feitiantang* were not recognized as gods or did not exist before

the 1980s, but they came to be categorized as gods during the *dajiale* boom. People believed that those who hit jackpots through divination ought to return something to the supernatural beings. The winners chose shelters from the rain for the supernatural entities in C settlement. The three old tombs had a simple roof; the banyan general had just a small shrine to stay in. They had simple equipment but they appealed to people to come and pray for jackpots. In fact, more and more people came and offered rewards to these “deities.” In 1996, people constructed a temple for the dead (Wugong 吳公, Liaogong 廖公, Liangma 梁媽) on the three old tombs and named it *Shuntiantang*. In 1999, another temple named *Feitiantang* was built for the banyan general. People regarded supernatural entities as “genuine gods” (*tsing-sin*) according to their “performances.” Their temples have gates and “divine guards” (五營 *ngo-iann*) to prevent ghosts from intruding. The supernatural beings are already seen as neither the dead nor *u-eng-kong*. Today, there are ritual organizations for each temple. A pot master is elected via *pue* tossing for daily rituals. This differs from *tua-bio* where the masters are elected from their donors every year.

5.2. Other Kinds of Deities and Temples

Jintaitang (金泰壇) is a small temple built close to *Daitianfu* in K settlement. The temple is worshipped by some Liu families who are prominent in the settlement. Their great-grandfather was a shaman. He was worshipped in the form of an ancestral tablet with the other ancestors after his death. In 2007, one of the descendants dreamed of him and was told that he had become a god named *Liufuqiansui* (劉府千歲) after his death. His descendants discussed this and decided to carve a divine statue for him that would be separate from the ancestral tablet. These descendants had a corporate estate that had been their old dwelling. In 2011, they built a small temple for the deity who “was” their great-grandfather. The deity is worshipped by seven lines of Liu descendants. An annual manager (主事 *tsu-su*) is elected from each line by a rotation system and takes responsibility for daily rituals⁽⁷⁾.

5.3. The Relationship between New Temples and *Tua-bio*

Devout believers emphasize that these new deities became “genuine gods” who are different from ghosts and ancestors. The other villagers are not so eager to make such a claim. However, these villagers are also respectful of the new deities in the collective rituals in the settlement (parades or annual rituals for the *tua-bio*). In fact, the origins of the deities of *Shuntiantang* and *Feitiantang* are similar to *u-eng-kong*, but people deny that they belong to that category. *Liufuqiansui* is emphasized as a “genuine god” to differentiate it from the ancestors. From the perspective of social relations, their largest difference from ghosts, ancestors, and *u-eng-kong* is that they can participate in the corporate rituals of

the *tua-bio* as “guests.” Of course, there are some other differences between the former two deities and the latter in terms of social position. *Liufuqiansui* is regarded as a “personal divine statue” (*su-put-a*), like the gods worshipped at domestic altars. In contrast, the deities of *Shuntiantang* and *Feitiantang* are never called *su-put-a*. The inhabitants explain that this is because they are “the common ones” (公的 *kong-e*) or “the gods for everyone” (逐家的神明 *tak-ke-e sin-bing*). According to this terminology, their temples appear to be called *kong-e* temples, which are “common temples” (*kong-bio*). However, this term is not used for these new temples. The term was already related to the *tua-bio* in each settlement.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored how the construction of temples influenced the social categories related to god worship in Taiwanese villages. The general trends in Houbi District show that the meanings of temples were transformed in local societies. It was in the post-war period that correspondences between temples and settlements became popular in the district. A series of local temple constructions made “no-temple villages” special. The cases mentioned by Suenari (1985, 1991) were coastal villages, which were Hakka in origin. My cases showed that his findings can be applied to inland and Minnan-origin villages. The cases in D Village also elucidate the meaning of temples’ appearances in the settlements. Their appearances influenced the social relations connected to god worship in the settlements. Corporate rituals conducted by associations could expand or reduce their membership numbers, as in some cases (Kiuchi 1988; Mio 1991). The foundation of temples made it difficult to expand or reduce the scale of the corporate rituals for the gods. The “*loh-kong*” (落公) transformed the associative rituals performed by both god-worshipping associations and descent groups into those performed in unison in a *tua-bio*. Chuang (1977) and Lin (1986, 1988, 2000) suggest that people form sub-settlement units called *kak-thau* (角頭). We do not have clear evidence that god-worshipping associations and descent groups in D Village did not form such territorial units before the temples were constructed. At the very least, such sub-settlement units did not play any role after the temples appeared in D Village.

The *loh-kong* made people in C and T settlements simplify the social categories for worshipping “gods”: *tua-bio* (大廟), *su-put-a* (私佛仔), and *u-eng-kong* (有應公). Only *tua-bio* came to be called the temple of *kong* (公), that is, *kong-bio* (公廟). The other gods that do not belong to *tua-bio* or *u-eng-kong* were sorted into the field of *su* (私), that is, *su-put-a*. In O settlement, people transformed the ancestral hall of the Niu families into a *tua-bio* for all the inhabitants. They adopted the god worshipped by the Lin families into the field of *kong* in the *tua-bio*. The process in O settlement simplified the social categories of gods as well as the *loh-kong* in C and T settlements. The god-worshipping associations became “informal” (Jordan 1972, p. 111), while *tua-bio* became formal in

this process. However, their once simple social categories for the gods were questioned again when new deities appeared during the *dajiale* boom (大家樂) of the mid-1980s. The *loh-kong* concentrated the gods into the *tua-bio* in the settlement. Such gods worshipped in the temple of *kong* are seen as “genuine gods” (正神 *tsing-sin*). Taiwanese people believe that the “genuine gods” represent the moral order and dislike people’s immoral desires (Mio 1995). The concentration of the gods changed their characters and made people seek new deities that would accept diverse desires, including gambling. These new deities did not interfere with the scheme of gods, ghosts, and ancestors. At last, they came to be recognized as “genuine gods.” They also changed the simple social categories for the gods, namely *tua-bio*, *su-put-a*, and *u-eng-kong*. The new deities were not seen as *su-put-a* because they became “gods for everyone” (逐家的神明 *tak-ke-e sin-bing*). Nevertheless, their temples were not categorized into *tua-bio*. In fact, the gods in *tua-bio* were also “gods for everyone,” the same as the new deities. People did not need to call them “gods for everyone” because they had been concentrated in a *tua-bio*, which represents the *kong* through the *loh-kong*. The social relations between gods and people experienced several transactions between the existing categories and new phenomena.

What will the social relations between the Taiwanese gods and the people be like in the future? Their relations will come into question again when the settlements lose their capability to manage temples and rituals due to depopulation. In Taiwanese folk religions, people cannot or should not remove the gods they once worshipped. The elimination of gods by Japanese Shintoists failed because of this folk concept. Today, the deities to be worshipped have increased while the population has decreased. We can already see some possible options for local societies. One possible option is adoption by individuals. For example, the Tandihu settlement in Houbi District has disappeared because of out-migration. The inhabitants dissolved their *tua-bio* and its organization. Their gods were adopted by one of the inhabitants for his domestic altar. Another possible option is adoption by famous temples or Buddhist organizations. Ancestral tablets without descendants have been entrusted to them in recent years (Ueno 1987; Ting 2012). Divine statues can be dealt with much like ancestral tablets. There is a Taiwanese saying that “Gods prosper, people become embarrassed” (神明興, 弟子窮 *Sin-bing hing, te-tsu king*). This shows us that the worshipping of the gods tends to escalate. People have their own logic for “rearranging” the social relations between themselves and their gods. What is important is that the localized supernatural is embedded within human relationships in the local society. It is especially pertinent that the “social status” of “gods for everyone” (*tak-ke-e sin-bing*) is not defined “privately” but rather “collectively.” People who have different statuses (educational, generational, occupational, etc.) participate in the defining process through corporate rituals and collective decision-making for rituals. It establishes the dynamics of the “social categories of gods”⁽⁸⁾.

Notes

- (1) In this study, “Taiwanese people” refers to Han-Chinese people living in Taiwan.
- (2) Lin (1988) claims that she considered “no-temple villages” and incorporated them into her “ritual sphere” model. However, she only regards “no-temple villages” as one of the basic units of “ritual spheres” in addition to other villages. She does not consider what temples brought to “no-temple villages.”
- (3) Kiuchi (1988) and Mio (1991) report that people called this kind of god *ka-lai-put-a* (家內佛仔) in the Penghu islands.
- (4) Hsu (1978) pointed out that some gods were related to the inhabitants’ origins.
- (5) Sagara (1933) wrote that people in the Baishatun (白沙屯) settlement in Houbi District set up a temporary altar every year before 1855. In the fieldwork of Suenari (1985), people conducted similar corporate rituals before the 1950s.
- (6) People usually carve two divine statues: one is fixed in temples or on domestic altars, while the other is a small, mobile statue used when the god ventures outside.
- (7) For cases of deceased persons in families becoming new deities, see Ting (2012).
- (8) This study was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP16J06753. I am grateful to Mrs. Lau Bi and the people of D Village for their support during my fieldwork. I would also like to thank young folklorists Wang Lung-Jui, Hsieh Wei-Chin, Lin Liang-Sian, and Suzuki Yohei for our discussions and their suggestions.

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